

Return to Use Initiative

2007 Demonstration Project

Kennecott Mining:

Salt Lake Valley, Utah

THE SITE: The Kennecott Mining site, about 25 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, Utah, encompasses the Bingham Mining district in the Oquirrh Mountains. Mining activities at the site began in the 1860s and continue to the present at the large Bingham Canyon open-pit mine. The last remaining mining company in the area, the Kennecott Utah Copper Corporation (Kennecott) currently has land holdings of over 93,000 acres. These land holdings include most of the historic mining area in the Oquirrh Mountains, which form the western boundary of Salt Lake Valley. The site is divided into two zones: the South Zone where ore is mined and concentrated and the North Zone where ore is smelted and refined. The two Zones are connected by a slurry pipeline. Although the Kennecott site was never placed on the National Priorities List (NPL), its cleanup can be considered a major accomplishment of the Superfund program and law. The threat of NPL listing served as a potent tool to motivate Kennecott and other parties to clean up the site voluntarily. When Kennecott executives learned from their own independent investigation the scope and extent of contamination, they came back to the negotiating table with a cleanup proposal and a work plan. In the 1990s, Kennecott conducted removal work under the oversight of EPA and the Utah Department of Environmental Quality to address heavy metals in site soils.

THE OPPORTUNITY: The desire to avoid Superfund's enforcement and liability provisions, a changed perspective by corporate executives, and the discovery of new real estate opportunities all influenced the drive to cleanup extensive contamination over thousands of acres in both zones. As early as 1993, Kennecott realized the possibility for significant land reuse, specifically the potential for real estate development, of large portions of its land holdings. Expected substantial population growth over the next thirty years in the Salt Lake Valley magnified the potential value of the land.

THE BARRIERS: Kennecott had to work to overcome early resistance from regulatory agencies and community representatives over initial cleanup plans. Kennecott, however, is a mining company and not a land development company. In 2001, Kennecott established the Kennecott Land Company to develop non-mining land. For the Kennecott Land Company's development plans to be successful, collaboration with the city of South Jordan was required. This necessitated communication, community engagement and involvement, and ultimately trust.

THE SOLUTION: Kennecott conducted a proactive environmental cleanup. Collaboration among EPA, the state of Utah, and Kennecott has resulted in a process where EPA has control and oversight of the cleanup. Once the Kennecott Land Company decided to build a residential community, it also decided to clean up all properties that will be sold to others to residential standards. In addition, Kennecott only works with developers who are willing to follow its vision of sustainability and safety. The Kennecott Land Company plans to maintain ownership of properties where waste is safely left in place and to lease them to appropriate parties. This unprecedented collaboration resulted in addressing the contamination quickly and at significant savings to the corporation.

Barriers:

Early resistance to cleanup plans and the need to develop a collaborative approach with regulators and the community

Solution:

Innovative thinking, recognizing the value of post-mining uses for land, combined with a cooperative approach to create a safe environment for redevelopment

Before:

Land representing a potentially big liability due to contamination over decades

After:

A development focused on economic and social sustainability that is already home to over 1,000 families

THE SITE NOW: Daybreak, built on the former South Jordan evaporation ponds, is a self-sustaining, pedestrian-friendly community that opened in 2004 and is home to over 1,000 families. The community will eventually include up to 20,000 homes and 9.1 million square feet of commercial buildings. The community will also feature 1,250 acres of parks, a recreational lake, community services, and mass transit.

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